

From: Gerald Heston/R3/USEPA/US
Sent: 3/20/2012 8:23:25 AM
To: Richard Fetzer/R3/USEPA/US@EPA
CC:
Subject: Fw: NRDC Blog: Why Is EPA Treating Dimock Differently than Pavillion, WY or Hood County, TX?

Gerald T. Heston, Chief
Eastern Response Branch (3HS31)
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency - Region 3
1650 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Phone: 215-814-3273
Fax: 215-814-3254

----- Forwarded by Gerald Heston/R3/USEPA/US on 03/20/2012 08:22 AM -----

From: Roy Seneca/R3/USEPA/US
To: Ron Borsellino <borsellino.ron@epa.gov>, Dennis Carney <carney.dennis@epa.gov>, Cecil Rodrigues/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Cynthia Metzger/ESC/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Driscoll.Stacie@epa.gov, duteau.helen@epa.gov, Ellen Schmitt/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Fran Burns/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Gerald Heston/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Heather Gray/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, hodgkiss.kathy@epa.gov, Humane Zia/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Jennie Saxe/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Joan Schafer/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, John Pomponio/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, JohnJ Butler/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, johnson.Karend@epa.gov, Jon Capacasa/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, krakowiak.john@epa.gov, Michael Kulik/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Roy Seneca <seneca.roy@epa.gov>, taylor.trish@epa.gov, Terri-A White/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Victoria Binetti/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Walter Wilkie/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, William Arguto/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Shawn Garvin/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, William Early/R3/USEPA/US, Michael DAndrea/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Daniel Ryan/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, David Sternberg/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Richard Rupert/ESC/R3/USEPA/US, Alexander Mandell/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, David Polish/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, William Smith/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Thomas Damm/CBP/USEPA/US@EPA, Brian Nishitani/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Ann DiDonato/R3/USEPA/US@EPA, Betsaida Alcantara/DC/USEPA/US@EPA
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http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/ksinding/why_is_epa_treating_dimock_dif.html

Why Is EPA Treating Dimock Differently than Pavillion, WY or Hood County, TX?

Last Thursday, the Environmental Protection Agency's Region 3 office issued an odd, informal announcement stating that preliminary water testing results for eleven of the sixty-one Dimock, PA homes tested by Region 3 showed non-hazardous levels of contaminants in Dimock drinking water. At the same time, the agency indicated that it would continue to provide water to three families while it conducts additional testing.

The statement comes two months after EPA Region 3 made a decision to issue emergency water to four families on the basis of previous testing done by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and Cabot Oil and Gas Corporation, and to conduct its own independent testing.

Here are a few things about the announcement that seem strange:

- Why no results? – In stark contrast to EPA's study of drinking water contamination in Pavilion, WY, EPA Region 3 declared Dimock water to be safe without making public the actual data to support its conclusions. This doesn't jibe with EPA's approach in Pavillion, which has been characterized by

months of careful study, full and complete review of the data, and formal press releases backed by publicly-available scientific reports. EPA should immediately make the full lab results available to the public.

- Why Eleven? – Also in contrast to the Pavillion study, Region 3’s announcement comes after only approximately one sixth of the Dimock water well tests have been complete (11 out of 61 homes). Why would EPA pick such a seemingly arbitrary cut-off to begin releasing the results of its investigation? (We do note that there are 11 families suing Cabot in federal court and that some (but not all) of these 11 families are the same.)

- What About Methane? – Region 3’s announcement does not address whether there are dangerous (i.e. explosive) levels of methane in Dimock water. While EPA maintains that methane contaminated water is safe to drink, at high enough concentrations it can cause explosions or asphyxiation. EPA Region 6 recognized the dangerous potential of methane contamination from fracking in Hood County, Texas in issuing an emergency order under the Safe Drinking Water Act which included mandatory monitoring for explosive levels of methane. This begs the question why EPA Region 3 has glossed over methane contamination in Dimock where, in the past, residents have been able to light their water on fire.

- Internal Inconsistencies in the Statement – EPA Region 3 mentions in the statement that the preliminary results do not show “levels of contamination that could present a health concern” but also states that it will “perform additional sampling” at three homes to ensure that the water “remains consistent and acceptable for use over time.” Additionally, Region 3 will conduct tests at two more homes where arsenic was detected in order “to better characterize the water quality of these wells.” It seems that this water is either safe or it is not. Why would EPA Region 3 spend time and agency resources characterizing safe water?

- Dimock Water Still Looks Dirty – We were sent this photo (above) of one of the affected residents’ well water the day after EPA released its announcement. Although conceivably this water may be safe, we certainly aren’t in a hurry to drink it. Moreover, we are told it can still be lit on fire.

EPA Region 3’s informal announcement last Thursday is another peculiar chapter in the Dimock saga, in which it has flip-flopped before. In a December 2, 2011 email, Region 3 stated that Dimock water did not pose an “immediate health threat,” but then reversed itself a month later, announcing that it would be providing emergency water to Dimock residents after finding that “a number of wells in the Dimock area contain hazardous substances, some of which are not naturally occurring in the environment.”

NRDC joins with others in calling on Region 3 to publically release its full testing results immediately so they can be reviewed and analyzed by independent experts.

Roy Seneca
EPA Region 3 Press Officer
Office of Public Affairs
seneca.roy@epa.gov
(215) 814-5567